

TENNESSEE AVENUE  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-710

HABS  
DC  
WASH,  
639-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## TENNESSEE AVENUE

HABS No. DC-710

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**Location:** Tennessee Avenue extends from the north side of Lincoln Park northeast to the original boundary of the city at 15th Street, NE.

**Owner/Manager:** The right-of-way spanning from building line to building line is the property of the U.S. government; the paved roadways, sidewalks and the planted areas between are under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia Department of Public Works. The reservations along it are managed by the District of Columbia Department of Recreation.

**Present Use:** Residential street.

**Significance:** This avenue remains largely faithful to its design on the L'Enfant and Ellicott city plans. All the reservations on the avenue remain basically intact since their official recognition in 1894, and several still contain markers and fences dating to the 1890s. The block between East Capitol Street and Constitution Avenue is within the National Register Capitol Hill Historic District.

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792 Ellicott Plan.
- B. Historical Context:

On L'Enfant's plan of 1791, this avenue originated from the north side of a large reservation (Lincoln Park) one mile east of the Capitol. One of the shortest avenues on the plan, it continues five blocks to the northeast at 33 degrees before terminating at the city limits at 15th Street, NE. It is a mirror image of Kentucky Avenue, which originates from the south side of Lincoln Park. Because Lincoln Park is farther east on Andrew Ellicott's plan of 1792, the length of this avenue has been decreased and its angle steepened to 31 degrees. Although almost every avenue on Ellicott's plan is named, this one is not. Perhaps the first map to show it as Tennessee Avenue dates to 1820 (although Tennessee entered the Union in 1796).<sup>1</sup>

The planned avenue runs along an historic route, known as Ferry Road, that existed before the city was founded, and continued to be called Ferry Road on numerous maps published after Washington was designed and founded in 1791-1800.<sup>2</sup> Traversing tracts of land owned by George Walker and Abraham Young, it ran through a region of the city that was very slow to develop.<sup>3</sup> The 1857-61 Boschke map shows a cluster of structures in the northernmost block of the avenue between E and F streets, NE. It also shows the narrow path, probably the old Ferry Road, running within the wide planned right-of-way; the nearby planned streets, avenues, and city squares appear uncleared. The citywide improvements by Alexander Shepherd in the early 1870s bypassed this avenue. Although the

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<sup>1</sup> Stone map.

<sup>2</sup> Harmon map.

<sup>3</sup> Toner map.

large open space at the base of the avenue was improved as the elaborate Lincoln Park between 1874-76, the four small government reservations on Tennessee Avenue remained unimproved as parks until after the turn of the century. In 1886 the John Walker Maury Elementary School was erected on the avenue at 13th and Constitution Avenue for the white children of the growing population in this section of Capitol Hill.<sup>4</sup>

The first evidence of any paving on the avenue is on a 1903 real estate map, which shows the block between Lincoln Square and Constitution Avenue paved with sheet asphalt and lined with a few brick structures.<sup>5</sup> The two parks at the north end of the block, Reservation Nos. 266 and 267, were improved in 1901. Development at the north end of the avenue also began in the first decade of the twentieth century. As this region developed, the Army Corps of Engineers charged with maintenance of public buildings and grounds added a new reservation on the avenue at the intersection of 15th and F streets, NE. The notation in the annual reports indicated that the new park was immediately set with curb stones and graded and stated that there were "a number of small houses in the vicinity." Residences began to fill in the lots facing onto the avenue within the decade, and as the population of the area increased, Richard Kingsman Elementary School was erected farther up the avenue at 14th and E streets, NE, in 1922. This school was expanded in 1938 to meet the needs of the local population.<sup>6</sup> Both the Maury and Kingsman schools, as well as the continuous line of houses framing the roadway, remain largely intact today on this residential street.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. Overall dimensions:

1. Width: The avenue is 120' wide from building line to building line.
2. Length within city limits: All of the approximately 0.65-mile-long avenue is within the historic city limits.

### B. Elements within the right-of-way:

1. Roadway: Between the curbs, the paved roadway supports two-lane, two-way traffic and parallel street parking.
2. Sidewalks and street trees: The brick and concrete sidewalks are flanked by sodded strips with street trees, signs, and street lights.
3. Large reservations: The avenue originates from the north side of Lincoln Park, Reservation No. 14 (See HABS No. DC-677).
4. Smaller reservations: The following list describe each reservation identified

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<sup>4</sup> Lee, 115.

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins map, 1903.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, 103.

along this avenue by 1894, the date it was first recognized as federal property, the date of transfer, the date of first improvement, if known, and a description of its appearance historically and as of summer 1990. In 1972, the reservations on Tennessee Avenue were all transferred to the District of Columbia, (Land Record 701).

- a. Reservation No. 266: South of the avenue, west of 13th Street, south of Constitution Avenue, NE. Officially identified in 1884, this triangle was improved by 1904 with a post-and-chain fence. The sodded park was broken into two pieces by a roadway cut through in 1957. The south portion shares the block with two-story rowhouses, and is delineated from the concrete-paver perimeter sidewalk by concrete coping. A deciduous hedge divides it from the abutting property. The north portion has concrete paver perimeter sidewalks except on the south side. It features a bed of yucca plants, a large shade tree, and a rosebush near the most acute angle. This acute angle also features an approximately 18" metal picket fence. Several paths have been worn through this park by pedestrians.
  - b. Reservation No. 267: North of the avenue, east of 13th Street, north of Constitution Avenue, NE. Officially identified in 1884, this reservation was first improved in 1901. Today this sodded amorphous parcel is divided into two pieces by 13th Street, NE. Concrete sidewalks run aside of the street. It is located across from the Maury School.
  - c. Reservation No. 268: South of the avenue, west of 14th Street, north of D Street, NE. Officially identified in 1884, this freestanding triangle is surrounded by concrete perimeter sidewalks and sodded street tree strips. Quarter-round coping, first installed around the park in 1925, remains today. A wide and sinuous concrete path weaves through the park from the southeast corner to Tennessee Avenue. Three concrete-base, wood-slat backless benches face onto the path from the north side. Ornamental trees and shrubs are scattered throughout the small park.
  - d. Reservation No. 269: North of the avenue, east of 14th Street, south of E Street, NE. Officially identified in 1884, this freestanding sodded triangle is delineated from concrete perimeter sidewalks by quarter-round coping that was first installed around the park in 1925. It also features one ornamental tree.
  - e. Reservation No. 269A: South of the avenue, west of 15th Street, north of F Street, NE. Acquired by the OPB&G in 1903, this freestanding triangle is planted with scattered shrubs and has a concrete sidewalk along 15th Street.
5. Front yards: For the most part, residences along the avenue have long front yards. Most of them are landscaped and enclosed with fences or stone retaining walls.

- C. Framing elements: Modest rowhouses built to the building line clearly define the corridor.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

- Board of Public Works. "Exhibit Chart of Improved Streets and Avenues." 1872.
- Boschke, A. "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years '57, '58, and '59."
- Ellicott, Andrew. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1792.
- Harmon, A. C. "1791 Map of the District of Columbia . . . Showing the Main Roads . . ." 1931.
- Hopkins, G. "Map of the District of Columbia from Official Records and Actual Surveys." 1887.
- L'Enfant, Pierre Charles. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1791.
- Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, showing the Public Reservations." Prepared by Orville E. Babcock. 1871.
- Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.
- Stone, William. "Illustrated Map of Washington," 1820.
- Toner, Joseph M. "Sketch of Washington in Embryo." 1874.

B. Early Views:

- 1927-29: Survey photographs of each reservation (Photographs of reservations transferred from NPS to the District of Columbia are in the HSW Reservations Collection).

C. Bibliography:

- Annual Reports of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1867-1933.
- Lee, Antoinette J. "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930." Unpublished manuscript. 1989.
- Reservation Files. Office of Land Use. National Capital Region Headquarters. National Park Service.

Reservations Collection. Historical Society of Washington.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold  
Project Historian  
National Park Service  
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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.